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ABSTRACT

Guided story invention is a strategy for whole language instruction. The strategy stimulates construction of story and storylike passages, and incorporates: (1) student knowledge of story structure; (2) the reading and writing of meaningful text; (3) a focus on meaning as a function of teacher coaching; and (4) encouragement of self-monitoring of reader understanding. Preparation is the first major component of the strategy. The teacher guides the discussion of students' experience in writing stories and knowledge of structure. The second major component, story invention, incorporates group writing, a model story situation, and questions to guide story invention or to elaborate the model situation. At the point of group writing, the teacher may serve as secretary, to record sentences for student discussion groups, after first choosing a sentence that will motivate further response. In the model situation illustrating the strategy, groups start with the same sentence, but with details altered. Students are then asked to respond to questions about characterization and setting, and each group continues the sequence, choosing sentences after a discussion period. The final component, reconstruction/extension, includes the two aspects of reviewing the process of story invention and children's independent application of that process. Adherence to the principles underlying guided story invention is essential to success of the teaching process. (One figure is included.) (SG)

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Guided Story Invention

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Guided Story Invention: A Whole Language Strategy

The importance of promoting whole language development has become more and more apparent. The whole language perspective is a culmination of a decade of focusing on four basic teaching principles that emphasize reading/writing as a meaningful act.

1. Learning to read/write is an extension of early learning experiences (Tovey & Kerber, 1986).

2. Reading/writing instruction should not focus only on subskills but should be presented as a meaningful act (Sheridan, 1986; Smith, 1986).

3. Teaching interventions should guide students to gain a feel for the reading/writing process (Gunderson & Shapiro, 1988).

4. If teachers viewed reading/writing through the eyes of the children being taught, interventions would be more effective (Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984; Walker, 1987).

These principles are based on some hypothesized construct of how children read, and from them, specific strategies have evolved (Gunderson & Shapiro, 1988; Riley, 1986). This article describes and discusses a teaching strategy designed to promote the reading/writing of story text.

The strategy simulates the construction of story and storylike passages, and incorporates (a) the application of students' early knowledge of story structure, (b) the reading/writing of meaningful text, (c) a focus on meaning as a function of teacher coaching, and (d) the encouragement of self-monitoring of reader understanding. The article concludes with an example case that exemplifies one of numerous successful applications of Guided Story Invention.

Description of Guided Story Invention

There are three major components to the strategy: (a) preparation, (b) story invention, and (c) a reconstruction/extension process.

Preparation. The preparation of students for Guided Story Invention includes a teacher-guided discussion of their past experiences in writing stories and their knowledge of structure. A second-grade class chosen for this project had had many writing experiences throughout the year. These experiences consisted of reactions to basal stories, story starters, and picture stimuli. In addition, each student had completed a personal red-bound book for a Young Author's Conference.

In addition, the teacher discussed the act of writing with the students, especially about how stories are constructed. The central question guiding this discussion was, "How do authors write a story?" Discussion focused on the parts of stories and how they might be written. It was concluded that (a) authors don't always write stories from the very beginning, and (b) stories begin with an idea.

On a chalkboard, the teacher then recorded the students' comments about story writing. Some students concluded, "You would not know how to begin a story in the middle . . . ." Others said ". . . you could start a story with a beginning, then make it fit . . ." or ". . . you could write the line just before and build it up to the top . . . ."

The second suggestion was utilized for the remainder of the activity. The teacher then asked, "If you started with a sentence just before the one you were given, how would you get to the end of the story?" Students responded that they ". . . would just write the next lines and then the story would make sense."

Story invention. Story invention incorporates three basic components: (a) group writing, (b) a model story situation, and (c) questions designed to guide story invention, or elaboration of the model situation.

For group writing, the students separated into two groups and moved into separate rooms to compete their writing activity and experience the process of story invention. In this component, the teachers may act as secretaries to record the stories for them after first choosing a sentence that will motivate and stimulate further responses of the groups. The teachers' knowledge of group interests dictates the type of sentence presented.

In the model situation for the first group, the starter sentence was "Beside the rock sat a small scaly dragon with a tear trickling down his cheek." It was determined that, for this model exercise, each group would use the same basic sentence--with the size of the dragon changed. Thus the revised sentence for the second group read, "Beside the rock sat an enormous scaly dragon with a tear trickling down his cheek."

After the starter sentences were read in the group sessions, students were asked to respond to two questions about characterization (main character) and setting:

1. What do we know about the dragon?
2. Where is the story going to take place?

Students' responses to the first question included, ". . . that he is a dragon," ". . . that he is enormous

(or small)," ". . . that he is crying." Students' responses to the second question included, "near a rock," "in the desert," "he is on the rock."

After determining knowledge about the main character and setting, the students were asked, "What do you think happened just before this?" Some replied that the sentence would need to tell why the dragon was crying. The second group thought another character should enter, so a knight was introduced. The first group composed a story about a dragon game. The latter story is used to describe additional incidents in Guided Story Invention.

Members of the group generally thought that the dragon was crying because his feelings had been hurt. When the idea was presented, several said his feelings probably were hurt by older dragons who would not play with him because ". . . he was too little . . . ." They said they had seen that happen several times ". . . on the playground to someone who was small . . . ."

After this discussion, their chosen sentence began, "Because the dragons did not want to play with him, he ran away to find a rock." The students failed to insert that the other dragons were larger, which was what the teacher expected as a more correct response; however, because the responses were logical

and extensions of the children's experiences, the sentence was accepted as valid.

After the sentence was recorded, the group read the partial story ". . . to see if it made sense."

> Because the dragons did not want to play with him, he ran away to find a rock. Beside the rock sat a small scaly dragon with a tear trickling down his cheek.

The next question asked by the teacher was, "What should happen next that would go with these two sentences?" Again, there was much discussion within the group and several proposals were made: "he could find a new friend," "he could just read a book," "he could get them to want to play with him." One student asked, "How would he get the dragons to play with him?"

The discussion continued and the group decided the dragon would invent a game. Thus the next sentences were created: "He invented a dragon game. He picked dragon hopscotch."

After the composition of each sentence, the group was guided into reading all of the sentences together to check that meaning and sequence were logical.

> Because the dragons did not want to play with him, he ran away to find a rock. Beside the rock sat a small scaly dragon with a tear trickling down his cheek. He invented a dragon game. He picked dragon hopscotch.

After both writing sessions were completed, the groups got together to compare their stories. They were amazed at the differences that had been arrived at while beginning with essentially the same sentence.

Reconstruction/extension. Reconstruction and extension includes two components: (a) reviewing the process of story invention, and (b) independent application of story invention by the children. The following day, the teachers involved brought out the stories and they were reread. Afterward, the students were asked to give the teachers the steps they used to write the stories.

Nine responses were recorded on the chalkboard and sequenced as follows:

1. Read the sentence on the paper.
2. Think of the character and setting.

3. Think about what happened just before the sentence on the paper.

4. Write down that sentence.

5. Read both sentences to see if they make sense.

6. Think about what happened just after the sentence on the paper.

7. Write down that sentence.

8. Keep doing that until you have finished the story.

9. Give the story a title.

The students then proceeded to each write something independently, following the steps and mirroring the group writing of the previous day. In preparing the initial sentences, the teachers chose to use animals as subjects. Sentences were designed so that there was one fantasy and one realistic sentence for each animal. The intent was to see whether the students would write about the given subjects in the genre of fantasy or realism. All but one student took the fantasy route.

An Example Case

Figure 1 is an example of a story constructed through the Guided Story Invention technique. Via the common criteria for correctness and sense, the story is not perfect. There are misspellings and incorrect

grammatical constructions. Graded for these efforts, it might not receive a passing grade.

Insert Figure 1 about here

When considering the story from a different perspective, one can recognize rather sophisticated attempts to invent a story from a single stimulus or idea. It is clear that the student conceived the story as a sequence of events and that an attempt was made to invent a story based on that concept. In addition, she projected her personal experiences into the story. She shifted from the rabbit as Easter bunny, for example, to projecting her own experiences with arriving home, eating vegetables, and wishing for a scooter.

Finally, she continually used a combination of personal experience, conceptions of story structure, and knowledge of language to make sense out of her own written passage. Her attempts to edit (as seen in erasures and corrections) and her attempts to impose story conventions (". . . and he lived ever after!") are examples of attempts to make sense of the act of story invention. These efforts at story invention endeavored ". . . to use all systems in making meaning

to accomplish purposes" (Altwerger, Edelsky, & Flores, 1987).

The Guided Story Invention story process is not a lock-step set of procedures. It is a reflection of the previously mentioned four principles (application of acquired knowledge, reading/writing meaningful text, focus on meaning, and self-monitoring) that underlie the concepts inherent in whole language instruction. We believe that adherence to these principles is the reason why the teaching process underlying Guided Story Invention is successful.

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Figure 1 appears on the following page.

Bree

Easter the Bunny.

Easter was asleep.
His mother said "Wake up".
Easter was getting reddy for school.
At schoel Easter made Easter eggs
When he came back from schoel,
The furry rabbit picked up his delicious juicy carrot.
Then he finished his carrot and went to play.
When he saw all the Easter bunnies working he remembe
Easter was tomorrow. Easter ran home going
It IS Easte tomorrow morn.
He saw his momdoing it to.
Easter it is Easter tomorrow.
It is Easter I Love Easter.
And Easter lived happily on Easterda